

72

GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE

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THERE were long periods in human history during which universal suffrage would have been inexpedient, and government by the people would have been harmful to the best interests of humanity. Advance was due not only to individual initiative—as it always has been and always will be—but to an initiative backed up by quietly-assumed, or violently-asserted, irresponsible authority.

It was one of the most important steps forward when the matriarchate developed from the early promiscuous habits of the human herd. But it implied not only that descent was counted through the female, but also that power, not delegated to her except by custom, was exerted by the mother, such as was necessary for the protection of prolonged and helpless infancy.

In spite of man's hard rule over his wives, the patriarchal organization that followed was an improvement on the matriarchate. It invested pater-nity with responsibility as well as with arbitrary power. When the tribal organization based on kinship gave place to city-kingdoms, such as those of early Greece and Rome, this involved the assumption of greater power on the part of the ruler, but it was necessary in order to break down the tribal organization, and to enlarge the basis of fellowship.

The sense of common interests and of a responsibility shared by all citizens produced the republic. In Europe men learned to use the ballot. At first the franchise was limited to a few families. The whole development, however, in the Greek republics, as well as in Rome, was in the direction of a gradual extension of the suffrage to a larger number of families, from an oligarchy to a democracy. Yet the idea of a universal man-hood suffrage was totally foreign to classical antiquity. Its civilization rested on a deep substratum of slavery. This failure to recognize the human worth and the potential value as citizens of masses of enslaved men was at once the condition of the marvelous growth of these republics and the cause of their downfall.

The empires of Alexander and Caesar, though reared by arrogant assumption and based on usurped power, served to weld together men of different tribes, different speech, customs and religious views. They broad-ened the foundations of citizenship. For this the centralization of power was historically indispensable. But men continued to ballot for their pub-lic servants. The Roman empire held the loyalty of its citizens not only by the order and security it gave, but also by the large measure of local autonomy it granted.

Such government by the people as had developed within the pale of Graeco-Roman civilization, though necessarily restricted in many ways, did not wholly disappear as the leadership passed to the Germanic nations. The great contribution of the Middle Ages was feudalism. It meant, in

12-38381

JF 851
54

State and church, a relation of mutual responsibility, of loyalty and chivalry, which furnished the basis of a truer democracy, destined to come in course of time. It could not appear, however, without the growth of an aristocracy of wealth, taking its place by the side of knighthood and clergy. Increased economic capacity and secular education led again to the republic, in Northern Italy and in Holland. But it was the aristocratic republic.

The great movements of the Reformation period, putting the choice of their pastors into the hands of the laity, paved the way for an extension of the political suffrage. The American Revolution recognized in principle manhood suffrage, yet did not fully trust it, and introduced many checks upon the expression of the will of the people, besides limiting the franchise to the whites. The French Revolution enfranchised the third estate. The history of Europe during the nineteenth century has recorded a steady growth in the direction of universal manhood suffrage.

It is well, however, to bear in mind the objections that have been raised against this extension of the full rights of citizenship to a larger number of men. It has been opposed, not only by selfish persons unwilling to concede to others privileges they themselves value, but by many earnest and disinterested souls out of a regard for the highest interests of society. The grounds have been chiefly lack of intelligence, of military ability, of economic capacity, of political experience and high ideals, of moral training, and of general fitness to belong to the governing class.

Let it be freely admitted that there was a deal of justice in these objections. How is it possible to have an intelligently-managed society, if it is ruled by ignorant and illiterate mobs, unable to read the lessons of history, or to form a judgment on the many questions that require wide observation and careful thinking? It is indeed a serious question whether any State has a right to confide its interests to men who cannot read and write, particularly if it is civilized enough to offer to all its citizens opportunities to acquire these rudiments of knowledge. There was a time when the great mass of men had no education, and when it would have been questionable wisdom to give a vote to an illiterate multitude.

It was once a legitimate and necessary part of the duties of a citizen to defend his city or State against attacks by enemies. Every community was in danger from every other community, every nation from every other nation. The patriot who loved the place where he was born, the language spoken by his fathers, the temples of his gods, and the precious possessions of his people, must be ready to defend with his life the walls of his native town or the boundaries of the State. If he had no military training, or was of a spirit so mean and cowardly that he would not protect his home, what right had he to a voice in matters affecting the public welfare? Might it not be justly feared that masses of men without military knowledge of martial spirit would, if endowed with power, put in jeopardy the noble achievements of centuries?

The same earnest question would naturally be raised in regard to the great mass of economically-dependent and incapable men, the slaves while slavery lasted, the unskilled laborers, the proletariat. What would become of man's richest treasures, the creations of art, the institutes of science, the temples of justice and of mercy, the homes of gentle manners and refined tastes, if the powers and prerogatives of a class that slowly, in the course of centuries, built these monuments of advancing civilization, were to be given to mobs, lashed with hunger, weary with toil, smarting with a sense of social injustice, envious of the well-to-do, resentful of long oppression, greedy for a place at the festive board, with no higher ideal than that

of filling the stomach, and no deeper craving than that for revenge? What irretrievable losses, what destructions by fire and by sword, what lamentable orgies of vengeance have marked those upheavals in history when they who possessed nothing, by a sudden turn of the wheel of fortune, became masters of men who had possessions and valued them!

No class of men, unaccustomed to the exercise of the franchise, unfamiliar with political methods and administrative affairs, without high ideals, comprehensive aims, and experience in shouldering responsibility, even though they be upright and honorable, can, by the simple act of enfranchisement, be endued with the wisdom necessary to safeguard the varied interests of society. But ignorance, defencelessness, poverty, and dependence are not conducive to the virtues most needed in a citizen. The very fact that such vast differences existed in the natural qualifications for citizenship, sometimes still further enhanced by the undeniable racial inferiority of the toiling masses, tended to justify the prevailing conception of society as necessarily divided into two classes, one born to rule and to command, another born to labor and to obey. Yet, in spite of all these objections, the suffrage has been extended from decade to decade during the last century, until at present there are a number of countries in Europe and America where the principle of manhood suffrage is fully recognized, and every civilized country in the world is striving toward this goal.

Why has this been done? Why has not the result been disastrous? Why has no country which has tried the experiment ever returned to the limited suffrage of earlier times? Because the grounds for the objections raised have themselves been removed. In some countries, there is today no illiteracy at all. In all civilized lands the number of men who cannot read and write is dwindling fast. Our education may not be all that we could desire, may indeed be very far from ideal. But the opportunities for acquiring such knowledge as is of prime importance to the citizen are practically open to all, and have been used in such a manner as to increase marvellously the political intelligence of the long-disfranchised classes.

Military prowess, once indispensable, is no longer a necessity. The city walls, once deemed so needful, have been torn down everywhere—almost too fast to satisfy the archeologist—because they were useless and in the way, since communities ceased to fight one another. Millions of men lead useful lives and render distinguished services to the State at the present time without ever killing anything but a mosquito now and then. No one is pusillanimous enough to propose a limitation of the suffrage to policemen, soldiers, butchers and hunters, on the ground that a man cannot be expected to vote intelligently on the tariff or the disposal of garbage unless he has killed his man or stalked his beast. Arbitration is fast taking the place of the resort to arms, and the nations will soon have to get rid of their useless war truck, just as the communities got rid of their walls and cannons.

The abolition of slavery and serfdom everywhere, the industrial revolution, the formation of syndicates of trade, the organization of laborers in all trades, and the manifold applications of science in production and distribution have so increased the economic capacity of millions of men that it is no longer possible to object to universal suffrage on this ground. It has been seen that great masses of men, earning their own living by the labor of their hands, and attached to their homes and their families, have, when enfranchised, used their votes for public improvements, as well as for measures tending to improve the condition of the poor.

Given a primary education and opportunities, even though they be limited, of reading books and journals, seeing dramas, and taking part in

discussion of vital questions in clubs and societies, there is the possibility of a most effective preparation for full citizenship, and for the development of political ideals undimmed as yet by moral compromise.

Partly as a result of this amelioration of social conditions, there has come a profound change in the conception of society itself. No longer is the social organism regarded as composed of two essentially different elements, of the rulers and the ruled, but rather as a body with many functions. The functionaries are not looked upon as lords, but as servants, responsible to the people. The public affairs are administered by agents, and the demand is increasingly heard that these shall not only be representative men, but executors of the definitely-indicated will of the people. Another result of the growth of civilization is a changed idea as to the latent possibilities in every human life, and the duties of society in view of these. The power of environment, rather than the accident of birth, is allowed to determine destiny, and with universal education inferiority tends to become an individual rather than a racial characteristic. All the grounds against the extension of suffrage to adult males having been thus removed, the objections have gone for naught.

During the last sixty years, a further extension of the suffrage, beyond the limits of adult manhood, has been agitated. Efforts have been made, and not without success, to secure the right of the ballot for women. The objections raised against this reform are precisely the same as those urged in the case of every proposed extension of the suffrage. Not a single new argument has been produced. It is the lack of education, of military training, economic capacity, political experience, moral and mental equality with the already-enfranchised citizens, and general fitness to belong to the governing class, that have been presented, with emphasis shifting from one to another of these supposed deficiencies.

There was, indeed, a time when woman, as a rule, received no education, and as a consequence lacked the training and knowledge desirable in a citizen. Her function in life was supposed to be to bear children and to bring them up, to prepare food, and make garments, and wash linen, and keep the house in order and the husband in good humor; and for trivial matters like these, an education was not regarded as a necessity. Deprived of the opportunities given to her brothers, she was ill prepared for the exercise of the serious functions of citizenship. But it ought not to be necessary today to call attention to the patent fact that this condition has absolutely changed. There are as many girls as there are boys in our primary and secondary schools, and the number of young women in our colleges and universities is constantly increasing, and approaching the number of young men. It may not be needless, however, to observe that, among the opponents of the extension to women of the privileges of education, there were not only men but also sweet, womanly women, who feared that an education would make the girls less attractive, less graceful, less capable about the house, physically degenerate and morally pervert. This superstition dies hard, and lingers on like a shadow in the prejudice in favor of a conventual life as against the natural and normal scheme of co-education. It would be easier today to base an argument for the disfranchisement of a considerable part of the male population on their evident lack of intelligence than to oppose woman's suffrage on the ground of her record in the field of education.

As long as no community could live without fighting, and no man's life was safe unless he was a fighter, there was some justice in the claim that man, the protector, and not woman, the protected, should have a determining influence upon the policies of the State. In our ordinary Occidental society, woman is quite as capable of taking care of herself as man is, and

man is, ordinarily, no more called upon to fight than woman is. Fighting is, fortunately, becoming so small and unimportant a part of life that the question whether a man or a woman knows how to use a rifle is perfectly irrelevant. If it is feared that women as voters will do away altogether with the barbarous practice of warfare, this would be an additional reason for giving them the suffrage.

The economic dependence of woman no doubt constituted for a long time a strong argument against enfranchisement. How could a wife dependent upon her husband's bounty, or an adult daughter eating her father's bread, be expected to act according to her own judgment in political matters? And, having been brought up in the idea that she might hang around the parlor making herself agreeable until some suitable suitor should appear and carry her off, what kind of political judgment would she be likely to develop? Millions of hard-worked women have, indeed, amply earned their living, but the law entrusted their husbands or fathers with the privilege of cashing and spending what these women earned. Thousands of women whose gentle breeding and social graces have made them most valuable members of the communities where they resided, have lived in galling economic dependence upon men.

In this respect, the change that has taken place is most significant. Millions of women are today earning their living, and are paid for their work. According to the latest statistics, there are in the United States about five million women who are wage-earners. They may not always get what they are worth. They are still, in numerous instances, paid less for the same kind of work than men are. But they support themselves with their own hands or brains, and are not supported by men. Aside from these, there are millions of wives whose economic status is vastly improved, and who, under the present economic conditions, are not doomed to starve, if not supported by their husbands, and whose right to independent use of money earned by them is more or less cheerfully granted. Hundreds of thousands of women are taxed for real estate or personal property, and all are in one sense taxpayers. This economic revolution has absolutely removed the ground upon which an objection could once be raised against woman suffrage. We are forced to recognize the fact that, with all our vaunted democracy, we are willing to tax some fifteen millions of our fellow-citizens who are productive laborers and add to the nation's wealth, but are not willing to give them the right to say how these taxes shall be spent. This is to say, gloss over the ugly circumstance as much as you please, we are untrue to the fundamental principle of government by the people, in which we glory.

It seems like adding insult to injury to charge against woman political inexperience, while carefully excluding her from the exercise of political privileges. If she has been indifferent to public interests, if she has failed to inform herself about them, it should in all fairness be admitted that she has not been given much encouragement. Her political ideals no doubt have suffered. Such ideals are born of long and earnest reflection on the teachings of history, the evils of present conditions, and the upward tendencies in human society. They are none too plentiful among men, though the great Utopias have been dreams of men, and the great reforms, including woman suffrage, have been first proposed by men. It is quite possible, and has occasionally happened, that women, accustomed to hold the family purse strings and to count carefully every penny, have as voters opposed even necessary improvements, on account of a small addition to the tax-rate. Such "penny-wisdom and pound-foolishness" on the part of women may, however, be a desirable offset against the recklessness of many men in voting large appropriations, and in meeting the needs of to-

day by mortgages on the future, to be paid by coming generations. And this conservatism has not prevented women from taking a most active part in the demands for proper sanitation, school facilities, and improved conditions of labor.

It is feared by some that woman as a voter would be inclined to exercise a petty tyranny over men, to re-enact antiquated sumptuary laws, to curtail the reasonable liberties of citizens. Whatever ground there may have been for such a fear in the past, it may be doubted whether women today are fonder of unnecessary and artificial restrictions than men are, since the tastes of men and women are, after all, so similar, and an increase rather than a decrease of personal liberty is likely to be the result of general education and universal political responsibility.

On the question of woman's moral fitness for the franchise, more sincerity and discrimination seem to be needed than at times characterize the discussion. Men declare, with fulsome flattery, that women are angels, paragons of virtue, too pure to mix with men in politics; or they cynically suggest that every woman has her price, and that political life would become rotten were she given a vote. Women, on the other hand, allow themselves to speak, in a self-satisfied manner and without the slightest tremor of shrinking modesty, concerning the moral superiority of woman, and of man as without any morality at all. Such statements are, of course, palpably absurd. Lump judgments of this sort are not conducive to peace and progress. Women discount the flattery, and men the abuse. Where is the evidence carefully weighed, where the statistics conscientiously sifted, by which it is possible to arrive at such conclusions as regards one-half of the human race or the other? I do not know whether women tell fewer fibs than men, whether they have a keener sense of honor, whether they are more temperate in language, whether they take larger views of life, whether they are more merciful in imputing motives, whether they are more independent in their judgment, whether they are more ready to admit their errors, whether they have more moral courage. The proportion of male or female prisoners in our penitentiaries does not settle these questions for me.

There are thousands of us who have every reason in the world to be grateful for the mothers who bore us, and the wives who stand by our side, and the daughters who have been given to us. But there are also thousands of men who have cause for thinking with sorrow and shame of those who brought them into the world, and with grief of their wives and daughters. What is the use of talking of all women as angels, and of all men as devoid of morality? We know it is not so. There is in both sexes the same mixture of good and evil. My own impression is that there are some moral qualities, needful in a citizen, that are more marked in women, and that there are other moral qualities, equally necessary, that are more marked in men. There are some virtues in which woman excels, and there are some other virtues in which man excels. It will probably be seen, in the long run, that neither morally nor mentally is woman man's inferior, nor yet his superior. They supplement each other; and the wisdom and virtue of both should be available in the direction and management of all public as well as private concerns. We shall thus have more of the morality of the manly man in woman, and more of the morality of the womanly woman in man, and more of the perfect type of humanity expressing itself in the citizen's vote.

Finally, it is said that there is one sphere in which man moves, and another in which woman moves, and that the privilege of commanding falls within man's sphere, while in woman's sphere the chief duty is to obey.

My friend, Dr. Lyman Abbott, characterizes the modern attempt to draw woman out of the sphere within which she formerly lived, and to endow her with the political rights of a citizen, as "An Assault upon Womanhood." The casting of a ballot being tantamount to a command, he sees in the very nature of this exercise something that absolutely prevents a woman from having anything to do with it. For "How could a woman command a man?" It should be granted that it is not a pleasant thing to contemplate, though by no means so uncommon as Dr. Abbott seems to think. But is it really a more gratifying spectacle to see a man ordering a woman about? The former has at least its amusing side; the latter is scarcely ever anything but disgusting. The management of a public concern, even though it involve the organization and direction of a large force of workers, whether by a man or by a woman, has nothing to do with that assertion of personal authority over another which we naturally find so revolting, whoever may exercise it. It is difficult for men of the passing generation to realize how fast the old conception of society as made up of commanders and obedient servants is vanishing, or to understand the new conception that is taking its place, that of a self-governing people.

Where a people really governs itself, its citizens regard it not only as an inestimable privilege, but as a duty, to inform themselves on all questions of vital importance to the growth and welfare of the commonwealth, to express their maturest convictions as to the measures that should be taken, and the representatives that should be chosen, at the ballot box, and to accept and discharge in an honorable manner every function assigned to them by their fellow-citizens. He is not a good citizen who shirks his duties as a voter, or refuses to render such services as he can to the public. Nor is she a good citizen who declines to leave the cloistered shelter of her home to work for the welfare of other homes, refuses to unite with her fellows to maintain in purity and efficiency the government of the people by the people, and petulantly cries, "Why thrust upon me new burdens?" rather than nobly answering the call to duty, "Show me what service I can render to the State and to humanity, and I shall gladly do my part." Mankind will ever gratefully remember those pioneers who, with little hope of ever seeing themselves the day of triumph, dedicated their lives to the cause of woman's suffrage, stood bravely in the thick of the fight when ignorance and prejudice and stupidity hurled their shafts, worked peaceably year in and year out, their message falling to all appearances on a listless world, sowed their precious seed of liberty and equality, and left behind the illustrious example of unselfish devotion to a reform affecting half of the human race.

The power of governing ourselves, as individuals, as States, and as a human family, has gradually grown in the course of the ages. Government of the people by some of the people, whether they were monarchs, aristocrats, or male electors, had its historic justification, as long as absolutism, oligarchy or manhood suffrage best served the interest of the people. The conditions, however, have changed, and the present world-movement for the enfranchisement of woman shows that, under the influence of advancing civilization, the nations of the earth are becoming ready for universal suffrage and the conception of society which it implies. For, in the ultimate analysis, it is not the extension of political rights to the last disfranchised class, important as this is, that is so deeply significant in this movement, nor even the fact that this class consists of women, but the new sense of social possibilities which it betokens.—Address at the Ontario County Woman Suffrage Convention at Phelps, N. Y., May 24, 1909.

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